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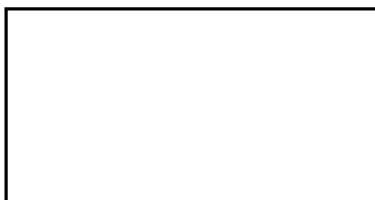
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Top Secret

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23 August 1973



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23 August 1973

25X1

Central Intelligence Bulletin

CONTENTS

25X1

LAOS: Prime Minister Souvanna pushing for showdown
with rightist critics. (Page 13)

25X1

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Next 13 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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LAOS: PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA IS PUSH-
ING FOR A SHOWDOWN WITH HIS RIGHTIST CRITICS OVER
THE CONCLUSION OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT WITH THE
COMMUNISTS. SOUVANNA HAS SCHEDULED A JOINT MEETING
OF THE CABINET AND SENIOR LAO ARMY OFFICERS FOR TODAY,
ACCORDING TO THE US EMBASSY. HE WILL SEEK APPROVAL
TO SIGN THE PROTOCOL IMPLEMENTING THE FEBRUARY PEACE
AGREEMENT ON THE CONDITION THAT THE COMMUNISTS GRANT
ONE FINAL CONCESSION--EQUAL STATUS FOR THE COMMUNIST
AND RIGHTIST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS IN A NEW COALI-
TION GOVERNMENT. IF THE CONSENSUS OF THE MEETING
GOES AGAINST HIM, SOUVANNA HAS IMPLIED THAT HE WILL
RESIGN. US EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN VIENTIANE HAVE BEEN
CONTACTING KEY RIGHTISTS TO IMPRESS UPON THEM WASH-
INGTON'S FIRM BACKING FOR SOUVANNA.

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23 Aug 73

Central Intelligence Bulletin

13

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